Toward an Aesthetic of the Post-Industrial Gothic

Research Thesis

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America is a nation built on industry. From a nationalistic point of view, this statement can be taken as an indication of America's scientific prowess, its position on the technological cutting-edge both in terms of the advancement of knowledge and of national infrastructure. Beneath this veneer of progress, however, will always lie a darker truth. The history of industry in America is one of great technological leaps and bounds, certainly, but it is also one of mass exploitation leading to illness, injury, and death. As the country deindustrialized throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the most obvious markers of this exploitation—the deaths of laborers at the hands of a deregulated system—began to disappear, but the scars on a landscape shaped by such a system remain—and so, too, does the embodied trauma inherent to any massive transition from one form of economy to another. As American industry faces its dusk in the wake of globalization and the concomitant outsourcing of industry to other countries, formerly industrial communities seek out ways to memorialize not only their dead comrades, but a slowly dying way of life altogether. The core question, then, at the heart of this shift is the question of how to best remember the past, how to represent or memorialize America's industrial history through media. One way of doing this is through the traditional monument, but this method is not always so successful at capturing the nuance and tragedy that lies within. Another answer, and the one I will argue for in this paper, is through the new genre of the post-industrial gothic, a genre which melds gothic convention with deindustrialization to explore the environmental trauma inherent in the loss of industry and the horror that lies within the deindustrialized landscapes left behind.

The Traditional Gothic

First used in the early 17th century as a purely demographic term to describe the Goth people or their language, the term "Gothic" has come to stand for many different concepts in the centuries since it entered into common usage. The 18th century brought it into usage as a term denoting an uncivilized past, a time period in opposition to the Classical. In this context, it was used to describe the architecture of the 12th to 16th centuries that rejected the Classical vision of symmetry and rational order. This description would then, during the Romantic period come to represent a genre or style of writing that also looked back to the Medieval Romantic period and focused on ruined architecture and revelations of the past. Of course, conceptualizing the idea of the Gothic requires more than just a purely etymological view. As Fred Botting notes in his essay "Gothic Origins," when constructing the meaning of the 'Gothic', "At issue [are] the differently constructed and valued meanings of the Enlightenment, culture, nation and government as well as contingent, but no less contentions, significances of the family, nature, individuality and representation" (57). Thus, a turn to historical context becomes critical to developing an understanding of the ways in which the Gothic mode has been employed in the past and how it maintains its relevance in the present day.

The rise of the Gothic mode of literature occurred in the mid-18th century in Europe, and it is this periodization that leads to the most salient feature of the context in which the Gothic arose: the radically changing social, economic, political, and cultural climate of Western Europe more generally and England specifically. During the 18th century, the social and cultural landscape of England underwent several radical shifts. Labor moved from pastoral to industrial, changing the nature of the ways in which common workers related to production and

consumption. The country began to urbanize, with masses of people moving from the countryside to the densely populated cities in search of work and opportunity. The American Revolution challenged ideas of governance and empire, and religion slowly began to be overtaken by Enlightenment rationalism and ideas of objectivity and science. Against this shifting landscape and, many argue, because of it, the Gothic genre arose. From industrialization comes a tendency toward alienation, and urbanization places this alienated individual in a new, uncharted space. Revolution brings with it a fear of violent change and rationalism, perhaps most terrifying of all, a loss of existential meaning. As Botting notes, "Gothic works and their disturbing ambivalence can thus be seen as effects of fear and anxiety, as attempts to account for or deal with the uncertainty of these shifts. They are also attempts to explain what the Enlightenment left unexplained, efforts to reconstruct the divine mysteries that reason had begun to dismantle, to recuperate pasts and histories that offered a permanence and unity in excess of the limits of rational and moral order" (49).

Along with change comes, inevitably, anxiety. The human impulse to section off and glorify the past in the face of an uncertain future remains one constant throughout the centuries. 'Things were better back then,' we think, and the present is so mired in change that it has become unrecognizable as an extension of what it used to be. The genre of the Gothic, however, seems almost to question this tendency, to look at the shifting landscape of the present and the certain horror of the past and draw connections, to examine the ways in which the past will always be a part of the present and, inexorably, the future as well. This enmeshing of timelines and the struggle to make sense of them serve as the basis of the Gothic genre. Ranger posits that "The gothic was not a movement in the sense that it was built on clearly-formulated principles. Instead, it can be thought of as an artistic climate assimilated by practitioners of a range of

creative arts" (408), and on this point, I agree. The gothic develops out of a period of time in which the fabric of society was fundamentally changing, and in their various different approaches to the inherent anxiety of change, the authors and artists of the romantic/gothic period utilized their shifting relationship with the past and the present to create something out of seemingly old concepts that was new, unique, and interesting.

In perhaps no other genre more so than the Gothic, ideas of space and time are inherently and essentially linked. Gothic spaces are often ruined and almost always antiquated, the ghosts of the past evident not only in the literal ghosts that often inhabit them, but also in the fading glory of the space that used to be. These spaces often serve as literalizations of the harsh passage of time, pulling the characters that inhabit them into a swirl of overlapping temporalities. While literalizing the passage of time, the spaces also can be seen as extensions of those who live within them. As Wood notes, "Traditionally, [the 'Terrible House'] represents an extension or 'objectification' of the personalities of the inhabitants" (423). This is to say, that while the characters within the narrative are informed and influenced by their surroundings, their dwelling place also serves as another character, one made up of the traits of all those who dwell within it. A haunted house may look and feel evil, but in most cases, that aura is just an extension of the true horror that resides within its owners. Wood also posits that "what the 'terrible house'…signifies is the dead weight of the past crushing the life of the younger generation, the future" (423). This statement is true not just for the house, but for ruinous gothic spaces as a whole, palimpsests as they are of the ages that have come before. As gothic media has trended more toward the visual, gothic spaces have become even more important within the canon. Now that oftentimes the audience of certain gothic works is barred from the main character's interiority, "the gloom and darkness of sublime landscapes [become] external markers of inner

mental and emotional states" (Botting, 21). Gothic spaces in visual media must carry both the weight of the past and the interiority of their protagonists.

The idea of shifting temporalities has always been central to Gothic fiction. Gross notes that "Gothic narrative has always looked backward; the past is its beginning and end" (57). While this is true, the reality of Gothic temporality is a bit more complicated. The narrative looks back, certainly, but in a way that is almost necessarily tangible, felt through the oftentimes ruinous setting and the impact that history has on the minds and actions of the characters within the story. Gothic stories are not simply about reminiscing, rather, they are an examination of the ways in which the past will always affect the present, the ways in which it is inescapable and in which our eventual decline into it is inevitable. "In a deconstructive echo of the postmodern," Vijay Mishra writes, "the Gothic becomes a force field that intervenes into the continuum of history and blasts it open. What this procedure implies is a kind of an aesthetic rendition of history that now requires us to go beyond theories of orderly narratives to those of the sublime" (146). Essentially, the gothic manipulation of time is something greater than just a return to the past; it is a recontextualization of historical, social, cultural, and political modes that seeps into the present in a sort of sublime miasma of building terror and uncanniness.

The figure of the gothic protagonist is often quite malleable, forced to navigate shifting spaces and temporalities while allowing their identity to become malleable and change in turn. The more mired in this change they become, the less they are able to relate to mainstream society and the more they must turn inward to derive a sense of meaning. This inward turn necessarily sets the protagonist apart from their fellow humans and foments a sense of disillusionment, and, as noted by Botting: "Alienated from society and themselves, Romantic-Gothic heroes undergo the effects of this disillusion, doubting the nature of the powers that consume them, uncertain

whether they originate internally or from external forces. Without an adequate social framework to sustain a sense of identity, the wanderer encounters a new form of the Gothic ghost, the double or shadow of himself" (22). This doubling can exist on a scale anywhere from a divided and disillusioned inner consciousness to an entirely distinct entity, bent on the obliteration of the protagonist from whence it came. As they are tested by the ever-changing fabric of gothic space and time and its effects on their own fractured psyche, gothic protagonists also must oftentimes face a distillation of this change in the form of a monstrous figure. The monster will further challenge the protagonist's notions of identity and will serve as the physical counterpart to their internal turmoil. It is only by confronting their fractured self that the protagonist can escape the gothic dimension in which they live, and, though gothic stories may seem bleak, Putner observes that within the hardship and pain the protagonist must face, "[we see] a repeated vindication of the individual's ability to survive despite transgressive threat to boundaries" (320).

The most notable aspect of the gothic protagonist and what will oftentimes set them apart from the protagonists of other genres is a deep turn to psychology and an intense focus on the ways in which social, cultural, and political systems can fracture the psyche. What Botting terms a "sense of individual dislocation" (24) manifests itself in a myriad of ways from a focus on the wild, unruly natural world to the creation of the gothic double, a mirror image of the protagonist that reveals the traits within the protagonist that the protagonist would most like to conceal. The double can also represent alienation, as Bomarito observes in the introduction, "as the consequences of the industrial revolution became apparent, writers increasingly began to express in their works the idea of the divided self as a reaction to unnatural pressures exerted on the individual by an alienating society" (233). Here, the double is representative of a version of humanity that resists categorization, that refuses to be put into the neat social boxes that an

industrial society demands of its inhabitants. The double is a reach toward a different state of being and an acknowledgement that the intricacies of the psyche cannot be easily encompassed by enlightenment rationality. In this sense, it is also a move toward an aesthetic of the interior sublime. In his treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke describes the sublime as a force which is "productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (110). Writing at the beginning of the Romantic period, he observes that oftentimes, the strongest emotions individuals can feel are closely related to fear, and thus, the sublime is most often used to describe a terrible occurrence which provokes and overwhelming rush of feeling in its observer. Mishra observes that the Gothic Sublime "questions the power of reason…and destabilizes the centrality of the ego" (153) thus invoking within its observer a sense of alienation from the self, a fearful fracturing that results in the creation of the monstrous double.

The final figure, the monster, takes its place in gothic narrative as the equal and opposite counterpart to the gothic protagonist's fractured psyche. It is the systems that assail the protagonist made physical, a luridly real manifestation of the socio-cultural anxieties and oppressions that the protagonist must contend with in order to better understand their own sense of self. As Botting notes: "…the monster has come to represent the fears about the existence of both natural and artificial mechanisms that not only exceed the boundaries of a humanized world but emerge, transgressively and destructively, from uncontrollable desires and imaginings in the individual mind." (26). Here, Botting makes reference to the monster's origin in the mind of the protagonist, its very existence a transgression of the thin line between psychology and psychosis. As the gothic protagonist struggles against the invisible chains of a system that has become a part of their own mind, they find their tortured interiority violently made into an exterior existential

threat, disharmony made corporeal. It is over the course of this struggle that the protagonist, inevitably, lays bare the flaws inherent within their understanding, within their milieu, and within the very medium through which their story is told. Botting continues: “The scientific replacement of nature and humanity, the various means of producing and reproducing the material world and the creation of entities that threaten human existence, is a recurrent horror, undermining the naturalness and stability of any order of identity or society” (26). This recognition of the power of science and industry over nature and humanity allows the Gothic scholar to position the former as the instigators of disharmony within the latter. Thus, the roots of the gothic conception of monstrosity lie in innovation and a rapidly-changing technological landscape.

As we distance ourselves further and further from the origin point of gothic literature, we are able to better trace the ways in which it has recurred throughout the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries in forms of media outside of just the novel. One of the most culturally relevant way we see the gothic genre manifesting still to this day is through film, most often through horror movies. Robin Wood posits that “in a period of extreme cultural crisis and disintegration, [horror movies] alone [offer] the possibility of radical change and rebuilding” (420). As the foundation of the Gothic genre is largely the manifestation of anxieties related to massive cultural change, this point is interesting as it recognizes that the Gothic genre need not be a tool simply for reaching back into the past toward a bygone era, but also for reimagining other possible futures and recognizing our capacity for radical change. In this way, horror movies can be seen to follow in the Gothic impulse to exploit the fractured psyches and surroundings of their characters, but make a move toward transcendence in choosing to reimagine the world into something new and different. The television Gothic, too, returns to classical Gothic formulas while rewriting them

for a new era. Where once Gothic tropes had been transgressive and horrifying, to an audience already steeped in mass horror media, they can become stale, as much a part of the old world they look to evoke as the ruined castles and haunted graves. By reimaging them into a new medium, however, they become something uncanny and new. Ledwon notes: "This new Television Gothic utilizes familiar Gothic themes and devices…But these elements undergo a sea of change once they are immersed in the 'currents' of television. What could have been a soothing repetition of formula instead becomes a disturbing process of transgression and uncertainty" (452). These popular gothic recurrences, along with the other recurrences during the Victorian period and the early 20th century, paint a picture of a genre that ebbs and flows with the landscape of popular culture, one that is just as much shaped by its cultural landscape as it is influential.

Bearing these aspects in mind, it is now necessary to develop a working definition of the Gothic as it will function in the remainder of this paper. Historically speaking, the Gothic is a genre that emerged in response to a changing society and the cultural anxieties inherent to societal transformation. From this landscape, gothic literature developed quite a few well-known tropes that have become staples of the genre, specifically relevant to this paper are ruins, the monster, the gothic double, and the overwhelming presence of the past. The gothic genre also represents a manipulation of both time and space wherein that past remains present through extant architecture. This extant architecture, often ruinous, then also becomes an externalization of the interiority of the gothic protagonist's psyche, often also ruinous and fractured. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the Gothic is a literary genre with defined tropes that collapses time, space, and psychology into a geographic landscape representative of the violence the past may

inflict upon the present and the effects that violence may have on an individual representative of a community.

Deindustrialization

Industry seems today to be an almost omnipresent reality of living in a modernized culture, and speaking historically, we can trace this development back to two major periods: the first and second industrial revolutions. The First Industrial Revolution, occurring between 1760 and around 1830, radically changed the structure and fabric of modern society in a number of different ways from revolutionizing industrial production methods to an immense increase in urbanization, population, and literacy. As the average income began to rise, capitalism became the dominant economic system of the Western world, and remains so to this day. The Second Industrial Revolution, taking place between 1870 and 1914, continued the trend of the first toward new technology, including automobiles and bicycles; new technological infrastructure, like railroad networks and telegraph lines; and improvements in different parts of the manufacturing process, like the invention of the Bessemer Process. Both of these historical periods would lead to increasing dependence on industry, both to maintain new, higher standards of living and as a reliable source of jobs and income, culminating in the dominance of American industry through World War II. Of course, even by the War, industry was beginning to look elsewhere for labor, and the future of industry in America began to look cloudy.

After the end of World War II, America entered a period of time that, while on the surface seemed prosperous, in truth marked the end of industry in America. Wilson notes that while “we tend to think of the 1950s as a golden age of industrial production, and the 1980s as an era of dramatic decline…throughout the postwar era, a number of basic industries began to

experience disinvestment early, as capital loosened and began the long process of relocation" (181). This relocation and disinvestment would come to be widely known as deindustrialization, a broad term that describes a diminution of manufacturing's traditionally prominent place in a given community (Summers, 9). As the back half of the 20th century progressed, the United States became more and more culturally aware of this shift. American citizens could only watch as "a seemingly endless stream of closing manufacturing plants [flowed] across the pages of the press," splashing the broad American cultural consciousness with narratives of loss and disillusionment (Harris, 17). This stream of bad news carried real, tangible outcomes for America's manufacturing sector. Between 1976 and 1982 "large firms eliminated over 16 million jobs," (Harris, 26) with plant closings alone contributing 3.5 to 4 million of those jobs "or 1 out of every 4 jobs in large manufacturing branch plants" (Harris 19). This large-scale shift in the economic makeup of the country would have a vast number of implications extending far beyond simply a reshaping of the industrial sector. As Summers notes, American deindustrialization would lead to "an increase in the prevalence of the working poor, the emergence of a blue-collar aristocratic class coupled with the presence of an enlarged permanent underclass…and a weakening of organized labor's ability to negotiate" (10). Thus, while it is perhaps not entirely accurate to call America a deindustrialized nation, it is evident that the structural effects of deindustrialization are still relevant and will continue to persist into the future.

One of the most important concepts to analyze in arriving at an understanding of American deindustrialization is that of capital mobility. This is, in essence, the ease with which owners can transfer capital or capital investments from one location to another. In the eyes of investors and shareholders, a greater amount of capital mobility is a good thing, as it allows them

to respond more fluidly to changing market conditions and continue to accrue wealth through their capital investments. As far as workers are concerned, however, an increase in capital mobility has a number of pitfalls. In the mid-1970s, some economic theorists argued that deindustrialization was not actually taking place as the manufacturing plants—the capital—was simply moving elsewhere in the country and thus the overall industrial output of America as a whole remained steady. What this argument does not take into account, however, is the ability of workers to move along with capital. While it is possible for large companies to move from one end of the country to another to ensure ever-increasing profits, the same is not true for those who worked at the now-closed plants the companies abandoned. As Barry Bluestone notes: "an increase in the velocity of capital mobility requires a sufficient improvement in the absorptive capacity of the economy to assure that the process of creative destruction is, on net, beneficial to society…the entire deindustrialization issue turns on this point, for deindustrialization…is relative" (48). With this concept in mind, the motivations and outcomes of regional deindustrialization become quite a bit clearer.

A primary and driving commitment on the part of corporations and shareholders to the pursuit of profit above all has created and perpetuated the negative human costs of the process of deindustrialization in America. When given no reason to care about those whose labor they exploit, corporations under a capitalist system will always prioritize profit over individual and community wellbeing. As Summers observes: "Capital investments are made to benefit the corporation and its share holders, who often represent several nations, irrespective of human and social costs" (13). He also notes that because of these policies and their inherent deprioritization of anything aside from profit, "Welfare of workers, stability of the communities in which work occurs, and the long-term health of the national economy are regarded as costs to firms and

therefore are to be avoided whenever and however possible" (12-13) With these realities in mind, we can observe that it is not necessarily simply the closing of plants and laying off of workers that is implied in the term "deindustrialization," but the inability of our current profit-driven system to care for those workers and communities who have been abandoned by firms taking advantage of increasingly mobile capital. Bluestone concludes his piece by observing that even the most basic analysis or simply a visit to those towns hit hardest by deindustrialization—Detroit, Youngstown, Buffalo, or Akron—will induce the realization that "capital investment has been insufficient to maintain basic industry or mitigate the apparent abandonment of entire communities" (41). Thus, it is clear that the project of deindustrialization is not only one of profit pursual, but one of neglect and outright disdain for the communities left in the ruins. Deindustrialization has profound effects not only on the economic viability of certain individuals and communities, but on their respective psychological states and senses of identity as well. As Cowie and Heathcott observe in the introduction to their book *Beyond the Ruins*, anyone looking to gain an understanding of deindustrialization must not only look at the hard facts and quantitative realities of industry in America, but must also foster a "respect for the despair and betrayal felt by workers as their mines, factories, and mills were padlocked, abandoned, turned into artsy shopping spaces, or even dynamited" (1). The devastating material reality of those dispossessed by deindustrialization is only part of the story; the other half lies in the unseen but never unfelt psychological dimensions of dispossession and disillusionment. A worker who has been let go must deal with several different and overlapping life crises at once, as Root observes, including "unexpected job loss; being unemployed in a labor market that is flooded with others who possess the same skills and experience; the shock of losing the security of a long-term job…the concern with both the coverage and the costs of health care; and reconsideration of

family options that have already been rejected" (53). This abrupt plunge from a state of security into one of uncertainty and fear contributes to a mindset that Summers recognizes as "psychological distress" (10). He observes that after being displaced, the former workers suffer symptoms consistent with this diagnosis from "dejected feelings of self-worth," to "a sense of fallen social status among family, friends, and the community," to "boredom; and bewilderment" (10-11). From these material and psychological conditions of displacement comes a loss of identity, both on the part of the individual and the community.

As individuals lose their formerly stable jobs and communities suffer from the effects of corporate abandonment, the identity of the individual and the collective are both called into question, drastically altered by their dispossession. The capitalist labor structure in America all but requires its denizens to construct their identities around their jobs. When we ask someone what they are, the most common response is to default to what they do. The essence of their being is in their occupation. They are a teacher, a plumber, a doctor. Thus, when an individual is fired or let go from their job, this abandonment can trigger a sort of identity crisis, especially because, due to the valorization of constant work under these systems, the worst thing someone can be is unemployed. According to Root, this stigma surrounding unemployment and, by extension, seeking out community or governmental assistance, can lead to a severe sense of alienation as an individual's conception of themselves as an actor within the system operating under their own volition is challenged by forces beyond their control (54). This challenge gestures toward a need to restructure the ways in which we think of identity both in general and especially when looking at the effects of deindustrialization. Cowie and Heathcott make reference to this situation as well as they observe that "the changing realms of identity sponsored by industrial loss [force] us to grapple with some of the most profound and personal aspects of

this historical transformation and [require] us to consider the varied and conflicting stories we tell ourselves about deindustrialization" (13). Here, they allude to the fact that it is not just personal or individual identities that are challenged by deindustrialization or industrial loss, but also those of the communities impacted by these changes.

In concert with individual identity, changing conceptions of community identity through the decades of deindustrialization also contributed to the sense of destabilization, disillusionment, and alienation fomented by the abandonment of small communities by large corporations. This loss of identity on the part of the community can be incredibly detrimental both to those living within in and to the opportunities for improvement the city will have moving forward. In his case study on the city of Gary, Indiana, S. Paul O'Hara makes note of just how impactful community identity can be both on the psychological wellbeing of its residents and on the city's ability to escape its reputation. When writing of the residents of Gary, O'Hara says "By the mid-1980s, the residents of Gary had lost the ability to shape and define their own city's image and landscape. Instead Gary had become a legendary example of a dangerous deindustrialized slum" (231). The psychological toll this shift took on the residents of Gary was matched only by the direct monetary toll it took on the city itself, closing Gary off by means of a bad reputation to those who could have helped the city. Despite its superior location, when Gary was in talks with Chicago to become the city's third major airport, many expressed concerns that Gary's image would deter customers from flying into the city (O'Hara, 233). Thus, Gary found that "the economics of urban image [had] serious repercussions in terms of the city's ability to attract new jobs and industries" (O'Hara, 231). With this in mind, it became quite clear to residents of Gary that the necessary first step toward revitalizing their city was to take back its image and redefine "Gary, Indiana," to mean something other than a deindustrialized example of

rustbelt decay (O'Hara 220). As a community's identity changes and suffers, the psychological scars are left not only in the minds of its residents, but in the physical scars of industry left behind on the surrounding environment of the town.

Just as the identity of a community becomes changed and unrecognizable, so too does the environment surrounding its inhabitants in the wake of deindustrialization and corporate abandonment. In the final few decades of the 20th century, America saw a shift in its environmental movement. Rather than prioritizing the preservation of untouched green spaces such as national parks, the nationwide collapse of industry led to an environmental movement focused on "the fate of postindustrial landscapes, from the sting of hazardous waste facilities to neighborhood struggles for safe playgrounds and schooling facilities" (Newman, 113). As inhabitants of these post-industrial landscapes began to feel the effects of the psychic loss of identity and physical alteration within their communities, it became clear that this environmentalism would have to be concerned not only with the embodied landscape of post-industry, but its psychic dimensions as well. Community members living in Love Canal, a neighborhood in Niagara Falls, New York, experienced firsthand the ramifications of living in a post-industrial world. Inhabitants watched in horror as "Trees rotted from the top town during the summer…friends and neighbors had a variety of sicknesses, and a massive chain-link fence warned people not to cross the covered canal, even though state representatives claimed that the residents need not fear the dump" (Newman, 131-132). These physical manifestations of deindustrialization change the psychological landscape of the town and thus, can create among the residents a feeling of solastalgia. In his book *Ecological Exile,* Derek Gladwin describes solastalgia as "the condition in which a person lives in *one* geographical loation, but with the lived experience of desolation and dislocation, despite still being at home, due to how that

geographical space has been altered through environmental degradation" (42). As they have remained in the same place, inhabitants of towns like Love Canal cannot be said to be nostalgic for another place; they are instead solastalgic for what their community used to be and have experienced some level of psychological distress as a result of an environment rapidly changing for the worse. Gladwin explains: "people are dispossessed without being forcibly removed, but are left to suffer the health and psychological effects of environmental, cultural, and psychic pollution" (41). Thus, it is not only the immediate effects of job loss that psychologically impact the victims of deindustrialization, but the lingering malice that lives in polluted water, toxic waste, brownfields, and leaking dump sites that renders their environment both hostile and unrecognizable.

With all of these different facets in mind, we must now define what we mean by "deindustrialization" in the context of this paper. To fully understand the complex implications of a term like "deindustrialization," we first must turn to its origins. In their introduction, Cowie and Heathcott acknowledge that "the first public use of the term 'deindustrialization' identified the Allies' policy toward German just after World War II, an active process of victors stripping a vanquished nation of its industrial power" (1). Recognizing that the term "deindustrialization" has its origins in subjugation is important to our understanding of how it functions in relation to its material reality in American society. When utilizing it, we must be aware that it encompasses not only a shift in labor relations in the United States, but also an implicit validation of a power dynamic wherein profit is prioritized over human life. As the Allies utilized deindustrialization to strip German of its industrial power, the mechanisms of industrial capitalism deindustrialize area where, in part, labor has become powerful enough that it is no longer profitable to remain. Deindustrialization is a result of capital mobility and pursuit of profit, certainly, but it is also

implicitly a punishment to communities deemed unprofitable or difficult, from cities like Yonkers, New York, which was abandoned in favor of the deregulated south when the powers of labor and unions became too strong, to cities like Lansing, Michigan, whose industries—in their case, military supply—were no longer profitable. Thus, inherent in the term "deindustrialization" is the implication of a power dynamic; it is not a natural force, but one brought about by systems of industrial capitalism. Also implicated within "deindustrialization" is what is means to be "deindustrialized." As we have observed, for individuals, communities, and environments, becoming deindustrialized is a deeply traumatic experience that leaves distinct scars across individual and collective psychological landscapes and requires individuals and communities to reimagine their identities in the vacancy left behind. Mirroring those psychological scars are the physical scars left across vast swaths of land from environmentally exploitative practices, scars that continue to perpetuate the alienation of the individual from their community. Taking these facets into consideration, in this paper, we will conceptualize "deindustrialization" as a process, facilitated by capital mobility, through which corporations abandon certain industrial sites, leaving behind individuals, communities, and environments that must redefine themselves in the wake of this betrayal. This process is also one which results in often severe physical and psychosocial damage to the individuals, communities, and environments it leaves behind and often offers them no recourse for addressing this damage outside of individual and collective non-corporate action.

Deindustrialization and the Gothic

The beginning of the gothic genre in the mid-18th Century owes a bit more to the immense societal change engendered by the First Industrial Revolution than is commonly

recognized. As Botting notes in his essay on the origins of the gothic genre, “important social, economic and political as well as cultural changes began to prise apart the bonds linking individuals to an ordered social world. Urbanisation, industrialization, revolution were the principal signs of change” (49). Out of this time of change rose the gothic, a genre born out of cultural anxiety surrounding the weaving of a radical new fabric for society. This pattern continues, and around the time of the Second Industrial Revolution, from 1870 to 1914, we can observe a resurgence in the popularity of the gothic with some of the most quintessential gothic novels, such as *Dracula* and *The Turn of the Screw* being published during this era. Finally, during the era with which this paper is primarily concerned, we see the gothic resurge once more beginning in the 1970s and continuing on into the present. Here, however, the nature of the societal change has differed. Now, instead of a rapidly-industrializing society, we live in an increasingly deindustrial one, where the importance of industry to the daily lives of American people has diminished in favor of a technological revolution that pushes workers toward the service sector rather than manufacturing. Some quality of the propulsion of science and technology into the future seems to call authors and artists back into the past, the changes within the framework of society inviting them to harken back to an earlier era. Perhaps it is the observation that the world around them, the one they were familiar with as they came of age, has fallen to the past, has become, essentially, a ruin of time. Or perhaps it is the fact that the present and the future will always be uncertain, liable to change at the whims of the powerful or random chance, whereas the past is solid, seemingly unshakeable even in the face of a dynamic present. It is not only the changing of society that brings about the gothic feeling, but the uncertainty that lies in the heart of those changes, the unknown repercussions we all may feel months or years into the future. In their introduction Cowie and Heathcott write “the aura of permanence that

surrounded the industrial culture of Europe and the United States throughout the twentieth century has made the experience of deindustrialization seem more like the end of a historical epoch" (4). With the end of an epoch, however illusory it may be, comes the beginning of another, and as epochs are classified only in retrospect, we once again are asked to look back into the past as we move into the future.

The tides of industry and the genre of the gothic are tied together not only through historical synchronicity, but through similarities in mood and theme as well. Both are quite preoccupied with ideas and aesthetics of loss and ruin. For the deindustrial mode, the reason is clear: communities have been left with the ruins of industry looming over them, reminders of a departed, more secure era. Within the Gothic genre, as I have suggested above, the preoccupation with ruin is indicative of a look backward, a sense of reminiscence for a time where everything seems clearer when viewed through the rose-colored glasses of hindsight. For the gothic, also, Botting notes that the recurrence of ruin points toward a turn inward, writing "The internalization of Gothic forms represents the most significant shift in the genre, the gloom and darkness of sublime landscapes becoming external markers of inner mental and emotional states" (21). Thus in this way are the themes of loss and ruin within both the deindustrial and gothic modes aligned. Just as the process of deindustrialization leaves physical and psychological scars across its landscape and people, the gothic's turn to the internal allows those two different cicatrices to become one.

The deindustrial and the gothic are also aligned in their tendency toward alienation. Beginning during the first Industrial Revolution, the capacity of industry to alienate is articulated in contemporary gothic writings. In the introduction to the "Gothic Themes, Settings, and Figures" section of the anthology, Bomarito writes "as the consequences of the industrial

revolution became apparent, writers increasingly began to express in their works the idea of the divided self as a reaction to unnatural pressures exerted on the individual by an alienating society" (233). The unnatural pressures spoken of here cause a fracturing of the sense of self, and as individuals work to rebuild that sense with the inherently alien nature of industrial capitalism, the doubled self appears. As industry alienates, so too does deindustrialization. When working to mitigate the alienation inherent in industry, industrial workers incorporate their profession into their identity. Thus, when industry is removed, the fracturing of the self recurs and the worker must once again seek to reconcile their conception of self with the world falling to ruin around them. While the alienation born out of industry was one of new and constant creation and innovation, the form born of deindustrialization is one of loss and ruin, reflected outward in the fracturing of societal infrastructure evident in the cities and communities abandoned by industry and capital.

It is out of these recurrences and commonalities that I propose the genre of the Post-Industrial Gothic arises. As I have established, the Gothic is a genre concerned with collapsing the boundaries between time, space, and psychology and representing the trauma of the present moment experienced by a protagonist through external landscapes. Deindustrialization, then, is a process that causes severe psychological damage to individuals and environments wherein certain locations where industry previously flourished are abandoned by industry which leaves to chase profit elsewhere. Thus, the genre of the Post-Industrial Gothic is primarily an exploration of the environmental and psychological trauma caused by deindustrialization through the use of Gothic tropes. The Gothic tendency to superimpose psychology onto the temporally-layered environment is particularly fit to explore the stratigraphy of trauma embedded within post-industrial landscapes and likewise, the relevance of deindustrialization to the Gothic is the

natural end to a centuries-long trend tying the two different realities together. The Post-Industrial Gothic is a genre born out of a long, conjoined history and whose value can be found in its ability to collapse boundaries between the historical and the literary to allow us to better understand the ramifications of deindustrialization on our collective psyche and on the psyche of the land.

Textual Analysis

In this section, we will be developing an aesthetic of the post-industrial gothic using elements of the gothic as outlined above and realities from the period of American deindustrialization as also outlined above. I will argue for the existence of this subgenre of the gothic based on similarities found across media engaging with what I will term tropes of the post-industrial gothic. I will also argue that the synchronicity of the timelines of gothic recurrence and changes in industry exist because the tides of industry necessarily feed into ideas of the gothic as exemplified through the new aesthetic I am identifying as the post-industrial gothic. In order to accomplish this task, I have outlined four distinct tropes within the post-industrial gothic that serve to illuminate its ties to classic gothic literature: The Company, The Disaster, The Monster, and The Industrial Ruins. Below, I will outline each trope and illuminate its ties to the classic gothic before delving into a detailed examination of how it is expressed in media of the post-industrial gothic and why this expression is relevant to a discussion of the ties between the gothic genre and industry. I have taken the video games *Kentucky Route Zero* (2020) and *Night in the Woods* (2017) as my two main texts, and will briefly outline the plot and mechanics of each game below.

Kentucky Route Zero is an independent, point and click, magical realistic adventure game developed by Cardboard Computer. It tells the story of Conway, a middle-aged antique deliveryman who must fulfill one final delivery before his antique business closes; and Shannon, a young television repairwoman who joins him on his delivery. In order to complete the delivery, Conway and Shannon must take the *Zero*, a paranormal highway that runs underneath the state of Kentucky. Along the way, they encounter a number of odd places, including an underground office building that houses the Bureau of Reclaimed Spaces, the Museum of Dwellings that showcases buildings in which people still live, and the Hall of the Mountain King, a massive cave with a mountain of old television sets and computers at its center. Conway and Shannon also meet and interact with a cast of interesting characters including Ezra, a young boy who lost his family after their home was foreclosed and now lives with his brother Julian, an eagle the size of an elephant, and Junebug and Johnny, two androids created to clear out the mines after a collapse who now travel the *Zero* as a performing synthpop duo. *Kentucky Route Zero* deals with themes of displacement, identity, exploitation, and disenchantment with traditional Americana.

Night in the Woods is an independent, narrative-based adventure game developed by Infinite Fall and released in 2017. This game tells the story of Mae Borowski, a college dropout who returns to her sleepy Pennsylvania hometown, Possum Springs, after several years away. As the narrative progresses, Mae becomes more familiar with the ways her town has changed in the wake of the mining company moving out and the ways her former friends have changed along with it. Mae and her friends ultimately uncover a secret cult that operates in the old mines of Possum Springs that has been sacrificing people who will not be missed to a deep pit for years in an attempt to appease the Black Goat and return Possum Springs to the way it was before the mines closed. *Night in the Woods* deals with issues of environmental mental health, the collapse

of industry and its effects on populations, and the loss of identity both within individuals and within communities.

The Company

Our first trope of the post-industrial gothic is The Company. The Company of the post-industrial gothic draws on gothic ideas of time and the sublime and often acts as the endorser or instigator of the industrial conflicts of the narrative. Within the temporal structure of the narrative, it often seems omnipresent. The typical rules of time do not apply to it. It comes from the past and will, by all measures, continue on indefinitely into the future. It has taken the place of God and seems almost naturalized within the world, just as capitalism has been thoroughly naturalized into our discourse. The Company speaks, too, to a naturalization of the power structures inherent to capitalism wherein labor is placed at the bottom of this new, industrial chain of being. It is almost impossible to imagine a time in which The Company will not exist or will not have any bearing on the lives and livelihoods of its subjects. In this, The Company approaches the sublime. The sheer scale of its control is awe-inspiring and terrifying in turn. The company takes on the figure of God, of the unknowably arcane and inhospitable.

In *Kentucky Route Zero,* the Consolidated Power Company seems to have overarching control over nearly every aspect of the lives of the characters within the game. When Conway must undergo surgery in order to fix his leg after the mine collapses upon it, the doctor explains to him that the Consolidated Power Company has taken over all medical bills. Thus, after Conway has his procedure, he will pay his bills directly to them instead of to the doctor. The Company also controls the switchboards found along the river in Act IV, notably Consolidated Auxiliary Switch Number 30. The lone woman working the switchboard tells Conway and Shannon of the switchboard's acquisition by the Company, and how, soon after, everyone save

for her was gradually laid off. The Consolidated Power Company's control also extends into the Elkhorn Mines, a location the player visits in the first act of the game where Conway's leg is injured, and one that comes back up frequently as it is mentioned by other characters or alluded to in environmental details.

In the world of *Kentucky Route Zero*, it becomes clear fairly quickly that the Consolidated Power Company controls everything. What's more, none of the characters ever actually come in direct contact with the institution. It exists as a faceless, formless entity that, despite its lack of a physical presence, dominates the minds and lives of its subjects. Even as it is everywhere, each aspect the player learns about it only makes it paradoxically more unknowable. What is initially just a normal power company seems to expand out forever, its power and influence seeming to touch every corner of the world of *Kentucky Route Zero*. Even on the *Zero*, the magical highway hidden underneath the state of Kentucky, there is no escape from the Consolidated Power Company's many hands. Though the people who live on the *Zero* seem to do so outside of the aegis of any formal government, even they cannot escape the influence of the Company. In this way, the Consolidated Power Company of *Kentucky Route Zero* serves as an excellent example of the Company in the post-industrial Gothic.

Within *Kentucky Route Zero*, the control of the company also manifests in the form of job and identity loss, and within themes of money and exploitation. As far as job loss is concerned, as previously mentioned, the most salient example of this is the story of the former employees of Consolidated Auxiliary Switch 30, now whittled down to a staff of one who must cover the jobs that everyone else used to do in order to maximize profit for the Consolidated Power Company. Conway, too, begins the narrative with a delivery he knows to be his last. The business he works for, Lysette's Antiques, is about to go under, and soon he and Lysette, his ailing boss who is

beginning to lose her memory, will be left jobless and adrift, a terrifying reality in the face of Lysette's worsening condition. As Conway becomes more distant from his occupation and more caught up within the bureaucracy that is the Consolidated Power Company, he begins to lose his identity as well. Once he falls into debt with the strangers, a group of skeletons that exploit his history with alcohol abuse to force him into deep debt, he begins to lose parts of himself. Where once only his leg, repossessed by the Company after his surgery, was depicted as glowing and skeletal, over the course of Act IV, Conway turns entirely into a skeleton drone, his involvement with the strangers stripping him of every last facet of his identity before entirely repossessing and reclaiming him. Thus, by becoming involved with the Company, Conway sees his personal identity stripped away in favor of the collective. An interesting reversal of this change can be found in the characters of Junebug and Johnny, two androids who formerly worked for the company. The two androids were constructed by the Consolidated Power Company as nameless, faceless, nonhuman laborers who would be used to clear out the collapsed Elkhorn Mines. When they came across the recordings of a project that had set out to record the miners' folk songs, however, they made the decision to abandon their jobs with the Company and instead seek out and create identities for themselves separate from their labor. As they shed the company, they shed, too, their facelessness, and become a musical duo who travel around the Zero playing small gigs and collecting sounds to contribute to their act. In this instance, we see a subversion of the idea that the Company is the most valid source for identity. Though they had an identity as beings of the Company, once Junebug and Johnny separate themselves from their labor and craft a live for themselves in the world underneath and outside of the Company's control.

Money changes hands in a variety of different ways in *Kentucky Route Zero*, all of which provides some illumination of the ways in which the economic system is stacked against those

who are not at the top. In Conway's case, the gripping machinations of the 'system,' embodied in the figure of the Company, are fairly transparent. After his surgery, Conway's medical bill is not to be paid to the doctor who assisted him, but rather to the Consolidated Power Company. That doctor, in turn, openly admits to being in the hands of the pharmaceutical industry and to prescribing Conway a specific medicine, Neurypnol, so that he may be able to pay off the debt he incurred while attending medical school. Within the system, the only way to make good on a debt is through physical payment in the form of labor, be that your own or that of another. As the doctor traps Conway's body to pay off his own debts, Conway allows his embodied identity to fade in order to pay off his own. Those who exist outside of the system have their own ways of making good with one another. When Harry is unable to pay Junebug and Johnny after their set at his bar, he instead gives them an IOU from a liquor company he had received earlier that morning. Furthermore, Conway remarks when the group goes to see another artist perform that tipping their fellow musicians is nothing more than "the unsteady steadying the steady" (Act IV). Thus, while debt under the aegis of the Company is necessarily embodied and requires all of oneself to pay off, debt between individuals living on the fringes is almost nonexistent. The musicians of the *Zero* all work together to support one another, recognizing their similar situations and building a sort of class solidarity amongst themselves in their rejection of the embodied debts the Company seeks to impart.

Coming from a different genre and medium, the trope of the Company is also core to the first two movies in the *Alien* franchise: *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986). In the world of the films, the lives of the characters are governed by the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, an interplanetary shipping and transport company that also establishes and operates human colonies on extrasolar planets. In the first film, every crew member aboard the *Nostromo*, a commercial towing ship,

has been contracted by the Weyland-Yutani Corporation to transport mineral ore, and in the second, Weyland-Yutani is responsible for establishing a colony on the dangerous planet from whence the titular alien xenomorph from the first film came. In both of these films, the corporation seems to have an almost omniscient presence—in the form of Mother, the all-seeing operating system from the first or Burke, the company representative, in the second—that dictates the lives and livelihoods of the characters from the recesses of an opaque bureaucracy. The figure of the Company in these two films is uncaring and devalues human life in pursuit of profit. Its inner workings and utter disregard for the wellbeing of the ones under its control is laid bare by a disaster of its own making. Though a few of the characters in each film successfully escape from the immediate danger the Company engenders—in both cases, close contact with the murderous xenomorphs—the world into which they escape is one where their lives are just as surely under the control of the Company as they were before. Even as Ripley escapes the Xenomorph and flouts Weyland-Yutani's orders to preserve the alien for study in the first film, she escapes directly back into the clutches of interplanetary profiteering and is forced to face the alien threat once more in another attempt to preserve investments. The recurring influence and dominating, omnipresent nature of the Weyland-Yutani Corporation speaks to its centrality within the world of *Alien*, and, despite the disasters it faces, its stranglehold over the lives of those who live underneath it only gets stronger.

With the stranglehold exhibited by the Weyland-Yutani Corporation in *Alien* and *Aliens* also comes the ability to use this power explicitly to exploit those without it. As an allegory for the domination of capitalism, the Company serves to illuminate the ways in which the system takes advantage of those not privileged enough to be a part of the ruling class. Aboard the *Nostromo*, the crew members are forced to abide by the Company's strictures or risk forfeiting

their pay. Thus, when they come upon a planet sending a distress signal, they must go down to investigate despite the risk to their persons. When Ripley wants to quarantine those who went down to the planet, her authority aboard the ship is subverted by Ash, an android and representative of the company, illustrating how little actual hierarchical structures matter to the Company in the face of its profits. Though Ripley is ostensibly in command in this moment, Ash forces her to capitulate to the will of the Company. Later on, Ripley finds out that the Company had given an order to the *Nostromo* to retrieve and preserve the life of the Xenomorph regardless of possible harm to the crew members. In this, Weyland-Yutani directly exploited the crew's need to earn a living within the confines of their system, intending to sacrifice their lives in exchange for a chance at a higher profit. Weyland-Yutani does much the same thing in *Aliens*. Prior to the beginning of the movie, the Company constructed a human colony on the Xenomorphs' planet, hoping to extract valuable resources without any regard for the safety of the colonists. After a group of scavengers bring the Xenomorph into the compound—having been instructed by Burke to explore the ship containing their eggs—and everyone is killed, Burke, a Weyland-Yutani representative, attempts to keep Ripley from executing a plan to bomb the now-infested colony from space, still desiring to profit from the colony. Even in the face of the death of hundreds of people, the Company will always continue to prioritize money over the lives and wellbeing of those it commands, and it will use the need for money of those who live within it to exploit and manipulate them into sacrificing their own lives.

In some deindustrial narratives, the Company will take on a more distant role, not being explicitly active within the narrative, but nonetheless exerting a subtle control over the events of the story. In *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, the slaughterhouse is a distant figure, mentioned only briefly within the events of the film. While it does not have the near-omnipotence of the

Consolidated Power Company or the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, it still subtly manipulates the lives of the characters within the film such that without it, the narrative would not exist. For the family, the main antagonists of the film, the slaughterhouse was once a place of catharsis where, through the act of slaughtering sheep with a sledgehammer, they could purge their negative emotions through capitalistically-sanctioned violence. With the introduction of the bolt gun, however, they lose that outlet and must instead turn their violent impulses to grave robbing and, ultimately, cannibalism. Lost, too, is a sense of identity, given that within a society preoccupied with occupational distinction, a change to one's primary source of income is also a change to oneself. As technological changes consume their livelihood and identity, they reflect that interior consumption outward, and in turn cannibalize others to fill the hole the slaughterhouse has left.

Similarly, in *Night in the Woods*, there does not exist one ever-present Company, but instead a network of smaller corporations vying for control over the denizens of Possum Springs and a looming industrial past wherein the former inhabitants of the town suffered underneath one such Company. Though the present-day figurehead of the Company is functionally absent, its absence is felt just as much as its presence was, resulting in a town that feels as if it has lost its identity. Now that the mining company from the town's industrial past is gone, other businesses are slowly migrating away from the area, evidenced in the closure of the Food Donkey—the local grocery store, the Husker Bee Ballroom, and the restaurant Pastabilities. These now-closed businesses have been replaced by telemarketing firms and megacorporations, from the Telezoft, where most of the city council is employed, to the Ham Panther grocery store where Mae's father works. The loss of the identity associated with the Company reverberates through the town. As the town's face—the storefronts of now-abandoned small businesses—falls into identificatory decay, so too do its inhabitants.

Living within a town in the state of decline, the loss of the central Company has left those living within Possum Springs with a chronic issue of job instability and, along with this, challenges related to identity. Almost every individual Mae speaks to over the course of the game lives in a state of uncertainty when it comes to their jobs. Mae's father, Stan Borowski, has bounced from job to job with the changing tides of industry in the town, working first in the mines, then in the now defunct glass factory, and currently for the large grocery chain Ham Panther in the meat section. Though he hates this work and finds it demeaning, he sticks with it in order to provide for his family and in order to keep himself from the despair-fueled alcoholism he had experienced in past periods of joblessness. Despite the fact that working in the mines was doubtless dangerous, thankless work, the employment provided Stan with firm ground to stand on and a sense of pride and identity in his work. Thus, even while recognizing that the figure of the Company is a representation of a dangerous and unforgiving system that will always favor profit, in *Night in the Woods*, we see that its absence can be just as damaging without accompanying structural change to offset the loss of income and identity that it provides for those who live within it. Just as the individuals left behind in the vacuum of the departing Company lose a piece of their identities, we see clearly that the town of Possum Springs, too, loses its identity in an outward reflection of its denizens' inward trauma.

The Disaster

The Disaster in the post-industrial narrative mirrors that of a traditional gothic disaster in that it is an event that occurred at some point in the past that will come to have direct effects on the story in the present. In the genre of the post-industrial gothic, the nature of the disaster as past is often questioned. In several narratives of the post-industrial gothic, the disaster happens in the

present, questioning and illustrating the mixing of temporalities inherent to the more modern gothic form. While in the prototypical gothic, this disaster is often something of a domestic or familial nature, in the post-industrial gothic, the disaster almost always related to the capitalistic exploitation of the working class. The effects of this disaster haunt the present through memorials to dead miners and microform newspaper clippings, and they live on in the personal and cultural memory of those left still living. The disaster illuminates the sublime nature of the twisting systems that stretch into the lives of the characters and the ways in which those unknowable systems are actively hostile toward the people of the world, in this, we find the sublime energy of being forced to confront the knowledge that capitalism is a system we created, but one we can no longer control.

In *Night in the Woods*, the founding disaster took place in 1888, over a century before the story begins. In the mines underneath the town of Possum Springs, 112 miners were killed in an explosion caused by an underground gas pocket. It is related to the player by a series of microfiche slides that the explosion occurred because the bosses of the mines, while they were aware of the underground gas pockets, chose not to tell their employees and instead to continue mining. In the aftermath of the explosion, the tunnel collapsed, leaving many miners who did not perish in the explosion to slowly starve to death in the now blocked-off tunnels. Furthermore, as other miners were trying to escape, the cables to the elevator that was hauling them up snapped and sent a group of men plummeting to their deaths.

The mining Disaster in Night in the Woods speaks to the shifting temporalities and entangled power structures inherent to the trope of the Disaster in itself. The mining Disaster resembles more the structure of a traditional gothic Disaster: an event that took place in the past that has bearing on the lives of characters living in the future, but still manages to shift the

temporal perspectives of the characters in an interesting way. Mae and her friend Bea learn about the disaster while they are doing research on ghosts at their local library using the microfiche viewer. Though the explosion is not the ghost they are looking for, the juxtaposition of all the different microfilm slide on the same sheet collapses the boundaries between historical events and paints Possum Springs as a town whose industrial history will always be a part of its post-industrial present. Furthermore, the articles on the explosion lay bare the power structures built into the town. Had the mining bosses seen fit to inform the miners of their proximity to the underground gas pockets, it is possible that the explosion and subsequent deaths of miners in various related accidents would not have happened. As the mine bosses chose to sacrifice miners to the altar of profit in the past, so too do the members of the Possum Springs cabal choose to sacrifice those who will not be missed to their pit deep in the abandoned mines in hopes that their town will return to the way it was in the past. Here, the disaster of the past echoes up through the present in the deeds of the cabal, and the irony of their longing to return to the past is evident in the mirroring of both sacrifices. The cabal views the past as a time of prosperity and wishes to return to a time when the mine was the center of the town's industry. In their valorization of past industry, they fail to recognize the very real and deadly past upon which the town is built. It is in this juxtaposition that Night in the Woods acknowledges this core paradox of post-industrial thought: even though the industries of the past provided steady, well-paying jobs, these industries were incredibly dangerous and had a very real human cost associated with their operation. Thus, the Possum Springs mining disaster helps us to recognize the echoing temporalities central to traditional gothic literature and just as essential to our ability to make sense of our industrial past.

Kentucky Route Zero presents another vision of a mining disaster, similar in scope and causality. In this narrative, the disaster is the collapse of Elkhorn Mine facilitated and exacerbated by efforts on the part of the Consolidated Power Company to cut costs. The Consolidated Power Company instituted a system within the Elkhorn Mine wherein power was rationed such that the mines would only be lit if the miners contributed tokens, worth some of their paycheck, to turn the lights on. Thus, when the miners accidentally broke into an underground lake and collapsed the mine, they were left to slowly drown in the pitch dark. As Conway and Shannon travel through the mines in Act I, they encounter the dark, ghostly remnants of the miners, all trying to find a way out of the mines. These ghosts serve not only as a representation of the embodiment of the miners' pain that lingers in the abandoned mine, but also as the first explicit indication of the magical-realist tone of Kentucky Route Zero. Within the liminal space of the Elkhorn Mine, Conway and Shannon cross from the above-ground highway to the Zero, and the narrative shifts from the story of a man making a delivery to a far grander tale of the intersecting lives and narratives of those who live on the margins. The disaster of the past allows the mine to become this liminal space, and the pain and death of the miners serves to transition the narrative both at the beginning and near the end of Act IV.

At the end of Act IV, Conway and Shannon once more cross over a barrier created by the mining disaster. As they approach Consolidated Auxiliary Switch 30, they travel through a bat sanctuary, wherein they find a memorial for the killed miners made up of a pile of their old helmets. The text on the monument reads:

> WE CLAIM THESE HELMETS IN THE NAMES OF THE FOLKS WHO WORE THEM AND WE PLACE THEM HERE IN THEIR MEMORY BUT ALSO AS A SPIT IN THE GREEDY GREEN EYE OF THAT POWER COMPANY WHO BOUGHT UP

> OUR OLD MINE AND TRADED OUR BROTHERS' AND SISTERS' SAFETY FOR A LITTLE MORE YIELD BUT ONLY YIELDED TWENTY-EIGHT GOOD MEN AND WOMEN DEAD WHEN THE WALLS COLLAPSED AND THE TUNNELS FILLED WITH WATER. AND IF ANY SON OF A BITCH FROM THAT POWER COMPANY WANTS TO TAKE BACK THESE HELMETS AS COMPANY PROPERTY JUST YOU TRY IT AND SEE WHAT WILL HAPPEN. (Act IV)

While the first expression of the disaster, Elkhorn Mine itself, seems eerie and unsettling as Conway and Shannon are surrounded by the spirits of the dead, this expression is at once mournful and furious. This memorial recontextualizes the ghosts seen in Act I, rendering them as sympathetic figures rather than potential antagonists. While convention asserts that a ghost is an antagonistic reminder of a violent past, Kentucky Route Zero positions its ghosts as tragic victims of the real enemy: the Consolidated Power Company and, by extension, the very systems that govern the priorities of an economy so willing to throw away twenty-eight human lives for nothing. In the Elkhorn Mine, Conway and Shannon cross from a world in which the mechanisms of power are obfuscated and hidden beneath the surface, to an underground world in which these systems are laid bare. In the darkness of the tunnels of the Zero, there is nowhere for corporate greed to hide. By the time they reach the memorial, Conway has already been manipulated into debt by the strangers, and as he and Shannon once more cross this threshold, his body is fully repossessed by the Company, and he is taken to work off his debts at Hard Times Whiskey. While the first threshold of the disaster presents a depersonalized mass of ghosts, robbed of their identities by their state as statistics of a tragedy, the crossing of the second threshold flips their personhood and Conway's. In the memorial, the miners are recognized as people, as members of a community who will not forget the violence that was

done to them. As he crosses the threshold, Conway's loss of personhood is subtler. His debt is not sensational; there will be no memorial to his own loss of personhood and autonomy even though those same exploitative systems which killed the miners perpetrated his own repossession. His own disaster is quiet, understated, but no less tragic, and in its recognition of its own past disasters, Kentucky Route Zero acknowledges and quietly memorializes this loss.

Similar to Conway's present reflection of the disasters of the past, some post-industrial media plays with temporality by placing the industrial disaster in the present and centering the narrative around it rather than calling back on a disaster of the past. In *Blade Runner* (1982), dangerous forms of labor such as mining in off-planet colonies have replaced human workers with replicants, a manufactured android with a lifespan of four years created for the sole purpose of working. The creation of these beings prefaces a story wherein four replicants escape from their colony and come back to earth to seek out their creator, the head of the Tyrell Corporation, in an attempt to gain a longer lifespan. This escape and the subsequent murders of several humans in Los Angeles constitute the central disaster in the film. Thus, the crisis in *Blade Runner* is born out of a conflict of identity. Though the Tyrell Corporation built the replicants to be simple industrial laborers, intended to work only as machines, sparing humans from the dangerous tasks they undertake, the replicants in question conceive of themselves differently. They see themselves as individuals with just as much right to live and create themselves as any other human being. Here, the devaluation of sentient life leads to a disaster in progress that the Company must stop. In their refusal to acknowledge the agency and interiority of the replicants they created, the Tyrell Corporation brings about disaster in the city of Los Angeles. In their unwillingness to submit and be controlled, the replicants model the results of a system based on the hubristic view that it is possible for industry and science to subvert and control nature. They

show that though they were created by science for the purpose of industry, nature will out, and they expose the inherent flaws in the idea of the nature-culture divide, an idea born out of enlightenment thinking that purports that the natural world and the cultural world are distinct and unrelated. As they are unwilling to submit to the culture that created them, the disaster caused by the replicants is not only fatal to the lives it affects, but damaging to the nature of the system that perpetuated it.

In both *Alien* and *Aliens*, the industrial disaster takes place in the present of the film. In the first, this disaster is the massacre of the crew of the *Nostromo* by the Xenomorph, an event facilitated by the Company's predatory policies designed to render the crew entirely subservient to and dependent on the Company for their livelihood. From this manufactured dependence came a crew willing to engage in incredibly dangerous behavior for the sake of subsistence. In *Aliens*, interestingly, the disaster is twofold, with the primary disaster being the contemporary one—the destruction of the colony on the Xenomorph planet—and the secondary one being that which happened in the first film. Tying these two disasters, separated by 57 years, together is the character of Ripley. As Ripley grapples throughout *Aliens* with the intense trauma she suffered at the hands of Weyland-Yutani in *Alien*, she also must contend with the corporate bureaucracy that was responsible for trapping her within the initial disaster. At the beginning of *Aliens*, soon after waking from the cryogenic sleep she entered into at the conclusion of the first movie, Ripley must stand trial for the destruction of the *Nostromo* and all the resources aboard which were the property of the company. Though the destruction of the *Nostromo* was entirely motivated by self-defense and was an attempt to destroy the Xenomorph that had killed every member of the crew save for herself, Ripley is nonetheless stripped of her pilot's license for her failure to prioritize the bottom line over her own life. Thus, just as the disaster recurs within her mentality,

manifesting as nightmares and panic attacks, so too does it persist in the physical realities of her life when the loss of her pilot's license—her ability to support herself through her labor—requires her to consult on the current disaster and once more come into contact with the Xenomorph on the company's behalf. Thus, the temporality of both disasters is condensed, and as they fold in on top of one another, Weyland-Yutani's hand in the destruction of countless human lives becomes clear.

The logical conclusion of the trajectory of the post-industrial disaster as depicted in media, then, is a disaster that occurs not in the past nor the present relative to the narrative, but in the future. Understandably, this is difficult to depict as the vast majority of any type of visual media takes place in either the present or the past with regard to the central narrative. Some representations of post-industrial disaster, however, take care to imply a sort of futurity or an iterative quality to their core disasters, and one such film is Alex Garland's *Annihilation* (2018). The disaster in Annihilation straddles temporality and seems, on the surface, to have little to do with industry or the gothic. The disaster begins in the past with the creation of the Shimmer, a region along the Florida coast created when a meteor landed in a lighthouse which mutates the DNA and physical forms of any who enter. Also implicated within the disaster is the disappearance of Lena's, the protagonist's, husband, who was sent on an expedition into the Shimmer and never returned. With the reappearance of her husband, Lena is placed on a path that leads her to accompany a group of other women into the Shimmer, and while there, all but Lena die or are consumed by the Shimmer, recreating the past disaster in the present. As Lena leaves the shimmer and reconciles with her husband, they both are shown to have retained a ghost of the Shimmer within themselves, implying that the disaster will continue to perpetuate itself well into the future. As these different temporalities continue to overlap and intersect, the

disaster, as well as the mutations caused by contact with the Shimmer, radiate outward, weaving their way into not only Lena and her husband, but into the Southern Reach—the agency that has jurisdiction over the Shimmer—as well. As they believed they could manipulate and understand the forces that lie within the Shimmer, the Southern Reach's hubris brings upon itself its own retribution in the form of the transformed Lena and Kane.

Though the Shimmer and the explicit narrative of *Annihilation* seemingly has little to do with deindustrialization, its core themes carry the seeds of the post-industrial gothic, bloomed into something strange and wholly different from the other texts discussed above. The aspect of this transformation most relevant to the trope of the disaster is the idea of control. Many post-industrial texts, such as *Kentucky Route Zero* or *Alien*, position the disaster as a direct result of a capitalist system that prioritizes profit over human life. Along with this position, this system also views the world in terms of resources than can be extracted: mines produce valuable minerals and the Xenomorph could prove a priceless contribution to weapons manufacturing. Thus, we can see that human labor, rather than being the product of a being with sentience, is just another resource than can be exploited to the end of acquiring more resources ad infinitum. *Annihilation* positions both the lives of the scientists traveling into the Shimmer and the Shimmer itself as resources, the former for their labor and the latter for the wealth of novel scientific information that can be derived from within it. This connection between the human and the nonhuman as resources is literalized through the character of Josie, who allows herself to become a part of the environment and transforms into a human-shaped plant rather than attempt to fight against the collapsing of distinctions between the human and the nonhuman. As the narrative looks toward a future temporality, however, the validity of a system based on resource extraction is questioned. As the researchers push deeper into the Shimmer, it continues to elude interpretation or

classification. With each attempt to better understand it, the Shimmer absorbs more of their personhood and mutates them, bit by bit, into something recognizable only in form. The further they travel into the unknown, the more transformed they become and the more the artificial barrier of the nature-culture divide breaks down. By existing within a culture that positions both them and the Shimmer as resources, the divide between humanity and the nonhuman is necessarily broken. As this disaster recurs, it becomes clear that the lines between what is human and what is not will only continue to blur as we move further past the era of enlightenment that brought us both this ideal and the system it perpetuates.

The Monster

The Monster is the trope within the post-industrial mode most similar to the classic gothic. It still stands in for the monstrous nature of the system in which the protagonist lives and often serves to inform the observer of the character's fractured mental state. It is often a being of supernatural origin that is shown to be able to manipulate and change the storyworld in ways otherwise impossible. In stories of the post-industrial gothic, however, the monster is far more often than not explicitly a result of the systems it critiques. It maintains the metaphorical level of the classical Monster, but also brings a new, more literal nature to its existence. While the Monster of the classical gothic tale is, more often than not, an allegorical representation of whatever the novel purports to critique, in the post-industrial gothic, the Monster is both allegory and reality, a commentary on social systems and a direct production of them as well.

David Robert Mitchell's 2015 film *It Follows* depicts a group of young adults as they attempt to thwart a supernatural entity that is following one of the members, a teenager named Jay. This entity passes from person to person when a person who is being followed has sex with

another, causing the entity to move on to following the new host. If the entity reaches its target, it will kill the person it is following then move back down the chain to the person who infected them and so on. Thus, once one has become the object of the entity, there is no way to ensure one's escape from its pursuit. The entity is notable for its thematic ambiguity; what exactly it represents or allegorizes is as undefined as its origins, and the dreamlike nature of the film only serves to underscore this ambiguity.The easy reading would involve the entity as allegorizing sexually transmitted diseases or perhaps the dangers, more generally, associated with casual sex. I would argue, however, that what the entity represents is perhaps a bit more complicated than such a reading would suggest.

In conjunction with the motif of the loss of innocence that runs throughout the film, the entity can be read as a direct manifestation of this loss of innocence and change in perspective, a modern-day representation of Pandora's box, the direct consequence of seeking out greater knowledge of the world in which you live. Through the setting of the film—a modern day, though at times temporally-dislocated, Detroit—it becomes clear that the knowledge represented by the entity is not only the knowledge of interpersonal relationships, but also that of the deindustrial reality of the world in which we live. Much like the transferal of the entity, once one gains this knowledge of the ways in which the capitalistic system is designed to exploit and dehumanize, it is impossible to escape. The crossing of this intellectual threshold takes place not only at the beginning of the movie, when the entity is transferred to Jay through intercourse, but near the end, when she and her friends travel to the community pool where the final confrontation will take place. They reminisce about how their parents used to forbid them from crossing 8 mile, the highway that divides the suburban side of Detroit, representative of innocence and the prelapsarian state, from the city, representative of the harsh reality of

deindustrialization. Once they cross this line, a reflection of the invisible line Jay crossed earlier in the film, they must acknowledge the existence of the entity, recognizing both at once its power over them as well as their own agency within the systems it engenders to attempt to fight it. In this way, the entity serves as a metaphor for the exploitative systems in which we are all entangled. Recognizing it as a part of our lives is difficult, as it seems incomprehensible and impossible to stop, but a failure to recognize the ways in which it manipulates us is just as dangerous. *It Follows argues* that while experience is life-changing and difficult to cope with there is a recognizable danger in innocence as well.

In the *Alien* Franchise, the primary antagonist of the films is the titular alien: the Xenomorph. The Xenomorph in and of itself exists merely as a force of nature. It seems to have no will or intention of its own beyond the animalistic desire to feed and reproduce. Thus, the struggle between the Xenomorph and the crew of the *Nostromo* or the Xenomorph and the soldiers called in to defend the colony can be read as emblematic of the ultimate futility of attempting to force nature into submission to man. Once more, this concept calls on the lies baked into the idea of the nature-culture divide and the fantasy that humankind can ever truly subjugate the natural world. This struggle also illuminates that the individuals who suffer from the misplaced desire to subjugate will never be those who order and desire to control the subjugation, but those who are forced to attempt to carry out the impossible demand. It is not the leaders of the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, nor even the integrity of the concept of the project itself, that suffer when an expedition fails, but rather the workers who are employed in that mission. Furthermore, while this failure to deliver reflects back on the company merely as a loss of money, for the workers, the ramifications of this attempted subjugation will almost always cost them their lives. Thus, within the *Alien* Franchise, the monster is the embodiment of the

violence wrought by capitalist greed, deftly explicating that those who suffer will always be those at the bottom of the ladder, whose labor is embodied rather than intellectual.

As *It Follows*'s entity serves as a representation of knowledge of the industrial past and *Alien*'s Xenomorph serves as the embodied violence of our capitalist present, *Annihilation*'s bear extends the inherent horror of exploitation into an undetermined future. After Cass, a member of Lena's expeditionary team, is dragged off into the night by an unseen force and found dead the next morning, the team becomes confused when they hear her clearly distressed scream coming from outside of the house in which they are camping. As the women find out immediately afterward, the voice is coming from the hulking form of a bear-like creature which has absorbed Cass's scream and is using it in an attempt to draw out the women. This tactic is successful as Anya, another member of the team, is driven to paranoia and suspicious of her fellow team members after she discovers a secret Lena had been keeping. The bear is mutated almost beyond recognition; its face looks skeletal, as if its skin does not quite cover everything, and it seems to have a human skull stuck into the side of its head. It also appears not to have fur and is covered instead in a mottled sort of skin. The bear is a fusion of human and nature, an avatar of the collapsing relationships between the natural world and the human and their violent recombination within a culture of exploitation. It is the natural conclusion of a societal process that dehumanizes individuals and strips them down to nothing more than the labor and resources that can be extracted from them. The usage of Cass's human voice to lure the other humans to their demise implies, too, that it is humanity's own hubris that will lead to our downfall. We are not led astray by alien forces or by the monstrous in and of itself, but by our own voices, repeated back to us ad infinitum, reaffirming our own internalized doubts and suspicions. Anya is goaded into engaging with the bear not because it is particularly convincing, but because it

presents her with a seductive reality in which she wants to believe. While Lena and Josie immediately recognize the sound as a monstrosity, Anya is betrayed by her own preconceptions and falls into its trap when she fails to question the mechanisms of the Shimmer and its dedication to tearing down the boundaries between the natural and the unnatural and laying bare the structures in which the women are entrapped.

In a strange subcategory of the Monster, we find the trope of the Gothic Double. Traditionally, the Gothic Double is a representation of a character's repressed self: Bertha Mason as the repressed sexuality of the virtuous Jane Eyre. Along with this representation of repression comes an undercurrent of fear. The character who has their double revealed to the is fearful of the possibility that they will no longer be able to repress and contain the facet of themselves that the Double represents. The post-industrial Double serves a similar purpose, though it almost always carries connotations of capitalist exploitation and potential transcendence. Often, the post-industrial Double will be a version of the protagonist that is far more entangled with the malicious mechanisms of their world than the protagonist themselves. The post-industrial Double, then, serves as a potential example of the protagonist's fate, should they choose not to fight against the systems which control their life. What is being repressed, then, is the fear of failure or the fear that resistance is futile in the face of incredible entanglement.

In Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, the figure of the double can be found in the tension between the antagonistic replicants and our protagonist, Rick Deckard, the man tasked with hunting the replicants down. Though the replicants were created to be nothing more than a mindless slave labor force entirely subjugated to the will of those the Tyrell Corporation sold them to, they subvert this expectation by developing wills and minds of their own and breaking out of the enslavement to seek a cure for their short lifespans. This demonstration of free will,

along with a chance encounter with Rebecca, a replicant who believes herself to be human, causes Deckard to question his engrained beliefs about the place of replicants within his society. Over the course of the film and culminating in the dying speech of Roy Batty, Deckard comes to realize that the replicants are far more than just machines and therefore perhaps require the same amount of regard that any human would. They reflect back at Deckard, in turn, his own complicity in a system that routinely devalues any type of human life, here that of the working class, that it considers expendable or unskilled. The replicants show Deckard a version of himself unable to escape from the entangling mechanisms of new Los Angeles, and in recognizing their humanity, he is also forced to reckon with the fact that his job inherently devalues and dehumanizes them and places him, paradoxically, also among the dehumanized class. In fulfilling his role within his society, he becomes just another extension of the system, a function of its dehumanizing rhetoric and practices. Even as he realizes the humanity of those he is meant to kill, in their reflection, he sees himself become inhuman, a symbol of the system he has only just begun to question.

Night in the Woods features two distinct doubles of the main character, Mae, each reflecting an aspect of her personality that she must contend with in order to find her place in the ever-changing Possum Springs. The first of these doubles can be found in the character of Casey, one of Mae's old friends who disappeared a while before Mae returns to her hometown. Casey is another young ne'er-do-well who, due to his lack of connections to anyone important in town and his history of mischief, is targeted by the cult as a good sacrifice victim as he likely will not be missed. After he is kidnapped and murdered by the cult, he is reduced in memory to a troublemaker, a kid that no one really liked who was assumed to simply have run away. In Casey's tragedy, Mae sees a reflection of what her life could have been. As an outsider to the

system—a college dropout who moves back home and lives, unemployed, with her parents—Mae recognizes in Casey's story a path she is in danger of treading to the same conclusion, and in his reduction, she sees her own fears of depersonalization and being forgotten amplified to their logical extreme. Mae's rebellious streak and staunch refusal to conform endanger her as she steadfastly represents herself as someone the system has failed to control. Her other double, the Sky Cat—a godlike entity that she meets in her dreams, shows her a different side of her disdain for conformity. The Sky Cat cares nothing for the affairs of people on earth and professes a philosophy of nihilism, viewing all of humanity as nothing more than a cosmic anomaly. At this extreme, Mae is exposed to another vision of complete disentanglement and, despite her attempts to detach herself from human connection and emotion, is repulsed by it. Both doubles show Mae the outcomes of an exclusively nihilistic, nonconformist worldview, but rather than being frightened by this and resolving to conform in the future, Mae instead finds solace in her community. In a society where the cult will prey on the most vulnerable members of the nonconforming groups, Mae realizes that the solution is not to disconnect herself from her humanity and assimilate into the system, but to find strength with her friends outside of the system.

The doubles in *Kentucky Route Zero* help to illuminate the deep entanglement of the individuals within the magical-realist vision of Kentucky and the systems that govern it. Conway sees his double within the Strangers, the skeletal workers at Hard Times Whiskey who drive delivery vans for the company. Not only is Conway also a delivery driver, but after visiting the doctor to heal the leg he injured in the mines, his leg has the same glowing, skeletal appearance as the Strangers. After being manipulated by the Strangers into massive debt with Hard Times Whiskey, Conway's body slowly transforms until it is entirely skeletal and glowing. After facing

his reflection, he trips easily from the more ambiguous servitude to profit required of individuals living under capitalism to a more explicit indentured servitude to Hard Times Whiskey. Unlike other characters who, upon confronting their doubles, vehemently reject the contorted vision of themselves, Conway's already vulnerable state as a recovering alcoholic allows the Strangers to manipulate him into a state where he sees no option other than to deliberately re-entrench himself within the predatory system. More ambiguous than Conway's double is the doubling between Shannon and her estranged cousin, Weaver. Along with their extreme physical similarity, Shannon worries at times that she's echoing Weaver's more morbid tendencies. The few times they come face to face, it is never in person, but rather through the medium of a screen with Shannon seeing Weaver's ghostly image on a television set. Weaver's strangeness is remarked upon by several other characters within the game, and her ephemeral presence seems to trouble Shannon at times. What Shannon sees in Weaver's image is not entirely clear, as we see through her perspective far less often than through Conway's, but it does seem that that ambiguity in and of itself is what Shannon is apprehensive about. As Shannon watches Conway fade back into alcoholism and ultimately lose his identity after his encounter with the Strangers, she clings even harder to her own personhood. Shannon is very concerned with the material and the embodied; she repairs television hardware for a living whereas Weaver makes a living appearing on television programs. In Weaver, Shannon sees her fear of the ephemeral and her concern that she, too, will disappear.

Much like *Blade Runner*, the doubles in the *Alien* Franchise are androids created for the sole purpose of fulfilling the orders of the ruling Company—the Weyland-Yutani Corporation. They fill the role of Ripley's double in both *Alien* and *Aliens*. In the first film, this doubling is a direct conflict, with Ash serving the Company over his human comrades and dooming almost all

of them to an early death. Ripley's humanity and care for her fellow crewmembers is distorted by the lens of capitalist exploitation into Ash's care for the company and its profits. In Ash, Ripley sees what the Company wants her and her comrades to be: a drone whose only loyalty is to the Company that owns it, devoid of personhood and individual will. Ash is a representation of what every worker would be under the Company's vision of a perfect system, and in violently destroying him then the *Nostromo* soon after, Ripley rejects this vision of the purpose of her labor and her humanity. In the second film, however, the doubling takes on a very different role. Whereas in *Alien*, Ash exposes how the Company views Ripley and her fellow crewmembers, in *Aliens*, Bishop helps Ripley come to terms with her trauma. Though mistrustful of Bishop and his motives at first, Ripley eventually comes to trust him and see him as a valuable ally in the fight against the Xenomorph queen. Through this reconciliation, Ripley is able to come to terms not only with her past trauma at the hands of the Company, but also with the value of her humanity in the face of overwhelming systemic violence. As she realizes Bishop is on her side, Ripley is able to overcome the Xenomorph queen and reassert her own humanity, along with that of Bishop, to those who value the pair of them only for their labor. She and Bishop are able to build solidarity on the grounds that they are both members of a class violently exploited by the Company, and through that solidarity, Ripley comes to terms with her trauma and is able to move forward in relative peace.

The Industrial Ruins

The final trope of the post-industrial gothic is the Industrial Ruins. Much like the gothic ruins of their predecessors, the Industrial Ruins serve as a tangible reminder of the past. They spatialize the mixed temporalities within which post-industrial gothic narratives take place and

allow characters to reckon with the industrial past and the effects deindustrialization has had on their reality. In a visual medium, the Industrial Ruins are especially important, as they allow the interiority of the characters to be reflected outward into the storyworld at large, enabling the audience to engage with interiority as they would with any classic gothic text. Within the genre of the post-industrial gothic, this reflection takes on new meaning as the environment the characters inhabit serves not only as a psychological backdrop, but also as an instigator of psychological trauma. As the characters live within a collapsing or collapsed environment, it is both the cause of and a reflection of their own progressively more ruinous mental states.

One rather common figure of the Industrial Ruin is the abandoned mine. The abandoned mine makes an appearance in both *Kentucky Route Zero* and *Night in the Woods* and in both cases serves as a sort of liminal space where the thinning of the boundary between past and present also leads to a thinning of the line between the natural and the supernatural. As a site of former industry and labor, the abandoned mine carries with it connotations of exploitation and, in the case of these two mines where disasters took place, needless death and destruction. The ghosts that haunt these mines are both remnants of the industrial past and externalizations of the present interiority of the characters. After she and her friends descend into the mines, Mae must confront the cult and the chthonic entity they worship known as the Black Goat. The Possum Springs mine, as the backdrop for this confrontation, allows it to happen in a sort of middle state—between the past and the present and between reality and nightmare. This ambiguity allows the player to question the existence of the Black Goat; is it really there in the pit in the mines, accepting the sacrifices thrown to it by the cult, or is it a projection both of the economic anxieties of the cult members and of Mae's own fear of depersonalization? The already-haunted landscape of the mines allows such tension to exist, and the question of whether or not it is

Mae's own fears that are haunting it in the present becomes unimportant. The Possum Springs mine is haunted by the memory of the industrial past, and it is through this memory and its haunting that Mae's traumatized present finds its expression.

The mines in *Kentucky Route Zero* serve a similar purpose, though instead of being a location for a final confrontation, they are, instead, a liminal space in the sense that they are the entrance to the supernatural space of the Zero. In Act I, Conway and Shannon must pass through the Elkhorn Mine in order to begin their journey to Conway's delivery destination: 5 Dogwood Drive. As the player's first real introduction to the supernatural within the narrative, the Elkhorn Mine, much like the Possum Springs Mine, carries within it the metaphorical ghosts of the industrial past alongside the literal ghosts of the miners who died within it. Against this backdrop, Conway and Shannon enter the mysterious Zero, and Conway falls victim to the event that will send him down the path toward his ultimate destination of indentured servitude: the mine collapses on his leg, injuring it and requiring he see a doctor to have it mended. Even as it is now defunct, the haunted spirit of the Elkhorn Mine remains, continuing to prey on the vulnerable and claim more victims for capitalist exploitation.

Another common figure of ruin within post-industrial narrative is that of the city, at times derelict due to the loss of industry, at others with a large and imposing façade, but with a dilapidated underbelly. Two such visions of the Industrial Ruin of a city can be found respectively in *It Follows* and in *Blade Runner*. In *It Follows*, the city is represented as a place of ruin and danger. When Hugh first passes the entity along to Jay, he takes her to the old abandoned Packard Plant to show the entity to her and explain its rules. Thus, the first time both the audience and Jay see the entity, it is within the ruined skeleton of industry, tying the knowledge of the entity to the knowledge of the past and of historical exploitation. The

protagonists have been cautioned by their parents to stay out of the city for fear of what may happen on the other side of the line. The city bears the brunt of the dissolution that comes as a result of deindustrialization; those who live within it are hit the hardest when it experiences hardship. Thus, the deindustrialized, ruinous city also serves as a physical representation of the knowledge of systemic violence. In the warning of the parents, there is an implicit acknowledgement that the city and the suburbs suffer differently in the post-industrial era—the system is designed to lessen the burden on those in the suburbs while greatly affecting those in the city. As they cross the line to pursue the final confrontation with the entity, the protagonists enter the liminal state of ruin, and from there, the danger presented by the entity merges with the danger of the city. In their attempted rejection of the entity, they try to return to a state of innocence, the state before they were forced to reckon with the knowledge of the systemic violence that binds them. Within the ruins, however, it is impossible to return to the way things were before as the very walls that surround them remind them of their loss.

Blade Runner's futuristic Los Angeles follows much the same pattern. Again, while parts of the city, such as the massive Tyrell headquarters, seem expensive and well-maintained, other parts have fallen to ruin, and, once more, the final confrontation between Deckard and Batty takes place in a ruined building. As Deckard is pursued by Batty, Batty seems at times to merge with the building and become a part of it, notably when Deckard hears Batty's voice echoing through the halls and when Batty's hand crashes through the wall in an attempt to grab Deckard. The ruined apartment, then, is an externalization of Deckard's fear of depersonalization. In the city, he is the hunter and the depersonalizing force facing the replicants; in the city he is able to ignore the inherent horror of what he is doing. Within the ruins, however, he sees his own actions reflected back at him. The apartment has always been there within the city, the ruin at the core of

its glamor, and in the final confrontation, Deckard must reckon with the ways in which he has been complicit in the systemic violence it represents even as Batty, the externalization of this reckoning, pursues him.

The final common site of ruin is a bit more subtle, often seeming to be fine on the surface but, like *Blade Runner*'s Los Angeles, containing a ruined heart within, and this site is suburbia. The best examples of this ruin are Mae's house in *Night in the Woods* and Lena's house and its double in *Annihilation*. In *Night in the Woods,* Mae and her family live in what is referred to by other characters as the 'nice' part of Possum Springs, and with just a cursory glance at her street, the player would be led to believe the same. There are no outward signs of decay as there are in the rest of the town. The houses appear nice and well cared for, unlike the apartment where Mae's friends Gregg and Angus live. The inside of Mae's house, however, presents a different story. Within her home's interior is a crawlspace that seems to lead into the old mines. Through context provided by several of the slides in the library's microfiche viewer, the player can infer that this crawlspace could be allowing poisonous gas from the mines that is known to cause hallucinations to leak into Mae's house. Thus, even within the confines of her seemingly safe suburban home, Mae and her family are still at risk from the unseen infiltration of the abandoned mines and, by extension, all of the other consequences that come as a result of deindustrialization. The hallucinatory aspect of the gas also calls into question Mae's perceptions. The question of whether or not what she is seeing is actually real, however, is thematically irrelevant. Whether her visions and the black goat are real or not ultimately does not matter as either way, they are the product of living within a community abandoned by industry. It is only a question of whether the effects Mae experiences are physical or psychological at their core.

Annihilation explores the idea of the falsity of suburban safety through the juxtaposition of Lena's suburban home with a house that she and the other members of her team happen upon in the Shimmer. In the opening scenes of the film, Lena's home is characterized as a place of loss and remembrance. She experiences several flashbacks to the time she spent there with her now-missing husband that are placed in stark contrast with the emptiness of the house in the present day. Though it seems fine and unassuming on the outside, it holds within it a tragic and all-consuming emptiness. Within the Shimmer, Lena and her team come across a ruined town and within that town is an almost exact replica of Lena's suburban home fallen to ruin and decay. In the Shimmer, the house still presents the team with a false sense of security, but this sense is soon after shattered by Anya's paranoiac break. The ruin of the mirrored house brings Lena's buried feelings of loneliness and isolation bubbling to the surface. The Shimmer has taken what was previously thought of as a safe place, though also a site of repression, and dragged the repressed emotions to the surface, transforming it, through ruin, into something entirely different and almost completely unrecognizable. As Lena is forced by the Shimmer to reckon with her past trauma, she finds space within the undefined territory of the mutated ruins to do so. As in its other forms, *Annihilation*'s suburban ruins provide a place of liminality where one is forces to face the demons of the past and given space to reckon with them while looking toward a future state of further transformation.

Conclusion

The genre of the post-industrial gothic functions not only as an examination of the ways in which our gothic landscapes have changed in the face of deindustrialization, but also our ways of remembering and reckoning with our industrial past. Manifestations of this traumatic past and

its equally traumatic dissolution bleed through into popular media in the figures of the Company, the Disaster, the Monster, and the Industrial Ruins. Through these tropes, we are able to engage with the condensation of different temporalities present in gothic fiction through the lens of industry and explore how this collapse impacts the lives and psyches of those it affects. We are also, in a broader sense, able to conceive of a new way of memorializing our industrial history that may avoid some of the issues facing our typical conception of the industrial memorial.

In his article on post-industrial memorial, Kirk Savage outlines trends in industrial monuments and the ways in which they almost invariably fall short of apt memorialization. He compares the modern industrial memorial to the military model of commemoration, wherein death and destruction are transformed, through art, into the bringers of life and liberty. It minimizes the pain and suffering of those it memorializes, making a silent argument to all who behold it that perhaps the ends do justify the means. As he observes:

> The problem with the military model is not so much what it remembers but what it forgets. Both war and industry work on the principle of domination, whether domination of human beings or domination of nature. Yet as they become objects of public memory, the violence of this act of domination becomes obscured, if not totally forgotten, replaced by visions of regeneration and progress…Military memorials almost always seek to transcend the core facts of warfare, and by doing so they do not ask us to think about war and its costs in any serious way. (254-55)

To properly memorialize industry, then, we must look to another solution rather than the valorizing model of the military. Perhaps, this solution can be found in the post-industrial gothic, a genre that allows for the recognition of the suffering of the past while also never compromising on its vision of laborers as victims of a system created expressly to exploit their embodied labor.

It stands to reason that a genre suited to horror and monstrosity would be an apt candidate to depict the scarred psychological landscapes left behind in places where hundreds have died as a result of industrial exploitation. Within the post-industrial gothic is a recognition that all that we consider modern is built upon the pain of the past, and rather than valorize those ghosts in an attempt to escape them, we must instead work to exorcise them and begin the work of mending our post-industrial communities in the present through a new kind of memorialization of the past.

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